Chapter 1: Introduction

Administrators of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) must possess a number of skills, including knowing how to conduct an evaluation. This resource book, written expressly for CAC administrators, is designed to give administrators who have varying amounts of evaluation experience the knowledge they will need to conduct either one-time or ongoing evaluations. This manual can also be used by those who contract with an external evaluator; it will be helpful in educating external evaluators about the issues surrounding a CAC evaluation.

Evaluation is essential. It is the only way to ensure that a program is benefiting, not harming, the people it is designed to help (Thompson and McClintock 1998). There was a time when reducing the number of interviews to one was the ultimate goal of a CAC. Research has shown, however, that it is sometimes beneficial and necessary to interview children more than once (for example, by using the extended forensic assessment) (Carnes 2001; Carnes, Wilson, and Nelson-Gardell 1999; Myers, Saywitz, and Goodman 1996).

Some directors have said that creating an evaluation resource applicable to all CAC administrators would be unlikely because each center is unique. Indeed, some researchers have argued that when programs such as CACs are widely diverse, it is impossible to conclude from an evaluation of a sample of projects whether the program's concept is effective (Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey 1999).

> "We get focused on serving people and forget to step back and look at our program. You have to evaluate. It's not ethical not to evaluate."

CACs conduct their operations differently, but that does not preclude the development of a general evaluation manual. Indeed, results of a telephone interview with program directors revealed vast similarities among their centers' core components (Jackson 2004).

The evaluations presented in this book focus on the National Children's Alliance membership standards, excluding organizational structure. (CACs vary in their protocols regarding these standards.) These standards encompass seven core components (among others):

- Child-friendly facility.
- Multidisciplinary team.
- Child investigative interview.
- Medical examination.
- Mental health services.
- Victim advocacy.
- Case review.

One benefit of a CAC evaluation resource is that it introduces standard procedures and instruments, thereby producing consistency across evaluations. A standardized evaluation system, if adopted, would

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allow CAC administrators to do the following:

- Learn from each other about how to implement the various evaluation protocols.

- Learn from each other about which systems are working effectively for whom and under what conditions.

- Customize their evaluation.

"You need to be able to defend yourself. We need a way to answer against the backlash."

What Is Program Evaluation?

Definition

The term "evaluation" means different things to different people (Gunn 1987). This manual will use the definition outlined by Rossi and Freeman (1993, 5): "The systemic application of social science research procedures for assessing the conceptualization, design, implementation, and utility to answer basic questions about a program."

Types of evaluation

Three major types of evaluations are covered in this manual: program monitoring evaluation, outcome evaluation, and impact evaluation. Other types of evaluations not covered in the manual are described in appendix A: Brief Descriptions of Other Types of Evaluations.

Program monitoring evaluation. Program monitoring evaluation is the systematic documentation of key aspects of program performance that indicate whether the program is functioning as intended or according to some appropriate standards.

For example, a program monitoring evaluation would be used to determine whether procedures for a child interview were appropriate.

Outcome evaluation. An outcome evaluation determines whether the program has met its goals. For example, an outcome evaluation will help determine the number of children receiving a child-friendly investigative interview.

Impact evaluation. An impact evaluation addresses the question: What is the effectiveness of the program? For example, an impact evaluation could determine what effect the child-friendly investigative interview process has had on children. Typically, impact evaluations must answer the question, "Compared to what?"

A comprehensive evaluation generally encompasses all three of these evaluation methodologies (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1996). Large-scale evaluations are not necessarily better than scaled-back evaluations (Scriven 1993).

Although it is possible to use one of these evaluations alone, evaluation methods are often combined. For example, to examine outcomes, a program's procedures will need to be evaluated to demonstrate that the program is providing services that are influencing outcomes. In fact, a program monitoring evaluation is essential for understanding and interpreting both outcome and impact evaluation results. Without program monitoring information, there is no way of knowing which aspects of the program were fully and properly implemented.

Evaluation steps

A typical evaluation will follow these general steps:

1. Select the evaluation team.

2. Decide on evaluation questions.

3. Decide on evaluation design.

4. Plan the evaluation.

5. Recruit participants.

6. Collect data.

7. Analyze data.

8. Write the evaluation report.

Evaluation is often thought of as a one-time event, but the evaluation process may need to be repeated to be sure any changes in the program are benefiting and not harming clients. Although potentially time consuming and costly, repeating an evaluation is the most effective method for determining if program changes are achieving their goal. Understanding programmatic change is vital. The following steps assist in determining the effects of changes made to the program:

1. Identify a problem.

2. Conduct an evaluation.

3. Interpret the results.

4. Make the necessary changes in the program.

5. Conduct an evaluation of the changed program.

6. Interpret the results.

7. Determine whether additional changes are necessary.

Repetition of this cycle may be needed to isolate the effect of change. Initial weak results in early findings may not necessarily indicate that the program's performance is poor. Rather, it may be an indication that further information is needed to determine why there is a problem in a particular area of the program.

How to Use This Resource Book

This resource book is designed to meet the general needs of all CAC administrators. Because the evaluation needs of CAC administrators vary widely, some sections and chapters in this volume may not be applicable for all users.

A telephone interview with CAC directors (see appendix B) found that 80 percent of the responding directors had never used an assessment manual. (Those directors who had used an evaluation manual had used manuals from evaluations conducted by Philadelphia's CAC, the United Way, court-appointed special advocates programs, and several other lesser known evaluation manuals). Yet 95 percent of directors believe an evaluation manual would be useful; 85 percent of interviewed directors reported elements they would like to see in an evaluation manual. The ideas suggested by directors served as the basis for this evaluation resource book.

> "We need evaluation because the first thing everyone asks is 'How do you know it [the CAC model] works?' We need to have proof that it works."

- Chapter 1 introduces evaluation concepts.

- Chapter 2 discusses the importance of evaluation and addresses benefits, barriers, and ways to overcome barriers to evaluation.

- Chapter 3 discusses the need for and how to assemble an evaluation team.

■ Chapters 4, 5, and 6 provide detailed information on the three most common types of program evaluations: program monitoring evaluations, outcome evaluations, and impact evaluations.

■ Chapter 7 discusses issues related to recruiting and retaining participants in an evaluation.

■ Chapter 8 outlines essential issues to address before implementing an evaluation.

■ Chapters 9 and 10 provide information on data collection and analysis.

■ Chapter 11 discusses the primary components of an evaluation report.

The appendixes are designed to complement these chapters:

■ Appendix A briefly describes other types of evaluations.

■ Appendix B presents the findings from a telephone interview with CAC administrators.

■ Appendix C contains sample measures to use in a program monitoring evaluation.

■ Appendix D contains sample measures to use in an outcome evaluation.

■ Appendix E contains sample measures and other resource information to use in an impact evaluation.

■ Appendix F contains all the exhibits referenced in chapters 1–11.

■ Appendix G is a glossary of terms used in this manual.

■ Appendix H contains a list of scholarly references and other valuable resources for conducting an evaluation.

Directors who are conducting their first evaluation may want to start by selecting one specific topic before moving to more complex evaluations. Do not expect the first evaluation to be perfect. Many unforeseen obstacles will arise. The first evaluation will serve as a reference point for future evaluations.

This manual explains the evaluation process and how to plan it, and what to do with the data. It includes an array of forms and instruments that can be adapted by individual centers.

Administrators who need further information or who are unsure how to proceed can consider contacting their local university for assistance (see "Community and university partnerships," chapter 3).